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# The Messages of Cyrillic

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# The Messages of Cyrillic

*Prof. Dr. Axinia Dzurova*



Saint Prohoros – icon, 18 century





St. Cyril and St. Methodius



To European cultural identity which has always been beyond politics and economy Bulgaria's accession to the EU with its Cyrillic alphabet was an act of equal impact to the events on the continent of over 1,000 years ago.

The development and establishment of Cyrillic, the new Slavonic alphabet in the 9th century in the young Bulgarian kingdom, and the rise of a national literature in Slavic, respectively Old Bulgarian language was an ambiguous message grounded in the imperative to measure up to the rest of the world. This notion made worthwhile the existence of the largest ethnic group which over the coming centuries defined the fate of the European continent. The Slavic peoples were granted right to praise the Lord in their own language similarly to the Greek and Latin-speaking world.

The success of this message at the time was entirely up to the foresight of the Bulgarian statesman – *Knyaz Boris*. The same statesman who sheltered in his capital city Pliska and later in Preslav the disciples of *Cyril* and *Methodius* who had failed in Moravia, and by doing so saved their educational mission amidst the Slavs from oblivion and obliteration. The historic setting was indeed favourable to his deed – namely the attempts of the Slavs and Bolgars who had settled on the Balkans as early as 4–5th c. to adapt the Greek alphabet to the Slavic language, and the similarities between the various Slavic languages. It was these similarities that later were opportune in turning the entire Bulgarian literary corpus of Greek translations to Old Bulgarian into a fund shared by all Slavic nations.

But let us take a step back into that turbulent 9th c., a time of battles for ecclesiastical dominance. The roots of Slavonic European culture are no different than those of the Old continent – Greece and Rome. Were we to go even further into the past, to the place of origin of the nomad tribes, then we would have to add to their European roots the culture of the Eurasian lowlands. Thus the collision, merge and interaction between the various cultural traditions were the most productive factor for the culture of Slavonic Europe.



тѣмъ црѣ, нѣмъ нмъ прѣбываше.  
 црѣ же мнѣхъ на вѣзъ не на вѣдѣ въ ко  
 пнани цѣ живни по пннцѣ. нѣмъ гннхъ  
 рѣхъ ша сѣмъ по зоры дѣ жѣца, вѣхъ трѣхъ  
 сѣмъ вѣхъ нмъ лѣтъ. нѣмъ лѣтъ вѣхъ хѣтѣ  
 прѣжде вѣрѣ лѣнѣ нѣ прѣжде гѣда.



црѣ вѣхъ на мѣлѣ сѣмъ нѣмъ нмъ  
 нѣмъ нѣмъ фѣтѣ нѣмъ гнѣмъ црѣ вѣ. нѣмъ  
 вѣхъ сѣмъ лѣтъ прѣсто лѣтѣ нѣмъ нѣмъ  
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Bulgarian Knyaz Boris



The majority of Slavic nations became part of the larger family of European Christianity during the early Medieval period when the traditions of the two cultural centres – of Greece and Rome were represented on the one hand by Byzantine, and on the other – as far as Roman influence is concerned, by the Franks and the Germans who had already appeared on the cultural landscape. The culture of Central, Southern and East Europe or Byzantine for that matter is far from monolithic. Thanks to the commonality of language, the Slavs though have the advantage of to an extent compatible enough literary base which gives grounds for a common denominator. This defined the Slavonic culture as primarily verbal culture.

And indeed Bulgaria, the oldest of the Slavic states (681 AD) was destined to play a crucial role in the period of the establishment of the new Slavonic civilization of Speech in Europe. It adopted, preserved and sustained through the centuries the Slavonic script and literacy and in the times of *Tzar Simeon*, son of *Knyaz Boris*, developed the first model of the Slavonic Christian state transforming the Church Slavonic literacy, the earliest literary tradition among the Slavs, into a literary standard for the other Slavic states. This important mission requires a reminder of the historic circumstances, the coincidences and political leaders who committed to and fulfilled what had been offered them by destiny.

At the close of the first millennium the European Christian community was subordinated to the Latin-Greek language dualism which was a natural consequence of the legacy from the Classical age. Over the period there were two large zones of language influence in Europe – the Latin and the Greek, Christian dogma has already plunged into separatism and the schism between the Eastern and the Western church was beginning to rise. The decline of Antiochia and Jerusalem, the invasions of the Arabs and the rise of Constantinople led to the expansion of Greek Christianity to the East.





What about the West? Arian heresy was gradually disappearing among the Goths, the Visigoths and the Vandals, the hegemony of Latin Christianity was being established – Latinization of the Franks and the founding of the empire of Charlemagne. The penetration of the Germanic peoples into the western civilization did not impact the balance between the Latin and Greek communities in favour of the latter until 12<sup>th</sup> c. The German Protestant riot was not for another five centuries.

At the beginning of the second millennium the largest ethno-cultural community was ultimately formed, united by a single language, and that was a threat to European Christian duality – the “Slavia Ortodossa”, (named so several decades ago by Italian researcher *Riccardo Picchio*). In a few centuries it spread across territories all the way from the lands of the Greek to the Eastern boundaries of the European civilised world. In that sense it is worth remembering the establishment of the church and the faith of the Slavonic language occurred at the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, which period also saw the flourish of a literature and a language quite different from Greek or Latin. That happened after the Bulgarian peoples adopted Christianity in 863–64 during the ruling of *Knyaz Boris*. His military victories led to substantial territorial gains and as a result the Bulgarian state was split between two ecclesiastical Diocesis – of Constantinople and of Rome. An exceptional diplomat himself who managed to juggle between the interests of Rome and Constantinople, the Bulgarian Knyaz succeeded in convincing both churches to

The Seven Saints –  
pupils of St. Cyril and St. Methodius



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 𐑇 𐑈 𐑉 𐑊 𐑋 𐑌

Ж В Г Д Е

[illegible]

Æ, ϕ, ρ, σ, τ, υ

송산 오대산

୨୯ ୩୦ ୩୧ ୩୨ ୩୩ ୩୪ ୩୫ ୩୬ ୩୭ ୩୮ ୩୯ ୪୦ ୪୧ ୪୨ ୪୩ ୪୪ ୪୫ ୪୬ ୪୭ ୪୮ ୪୯ ୫୦ ୫୧ ୫୨ ୫୩ ୫୪ ୫୫ ୫୬ ୫୭ ୫୮ ୫୯ ୬୦ ୬୧ ୬୨ ୬୩ ୬୪ ୬୫ ୬୬ ୬୭ ୬୮ ୬୯ ୭୦ ୭୧ ୭୨ ୭୩ ୭୪ ୭୫ ୭୬ ୭୭ ୭୮ ୭୯ ୮୦ ୮୧ ୮୨ ୮୩ ୮୪ ୮୫ ୮୬ ୮୭ ୮୮ ୮୯ ୯୦ ୯୧ ୯୨ ୯୩ ୯୪ ୯୫ ୯୬ ୯୭ ୯୮ ୯୯ ୧୦୦

Æ A



## Assemani Gospel



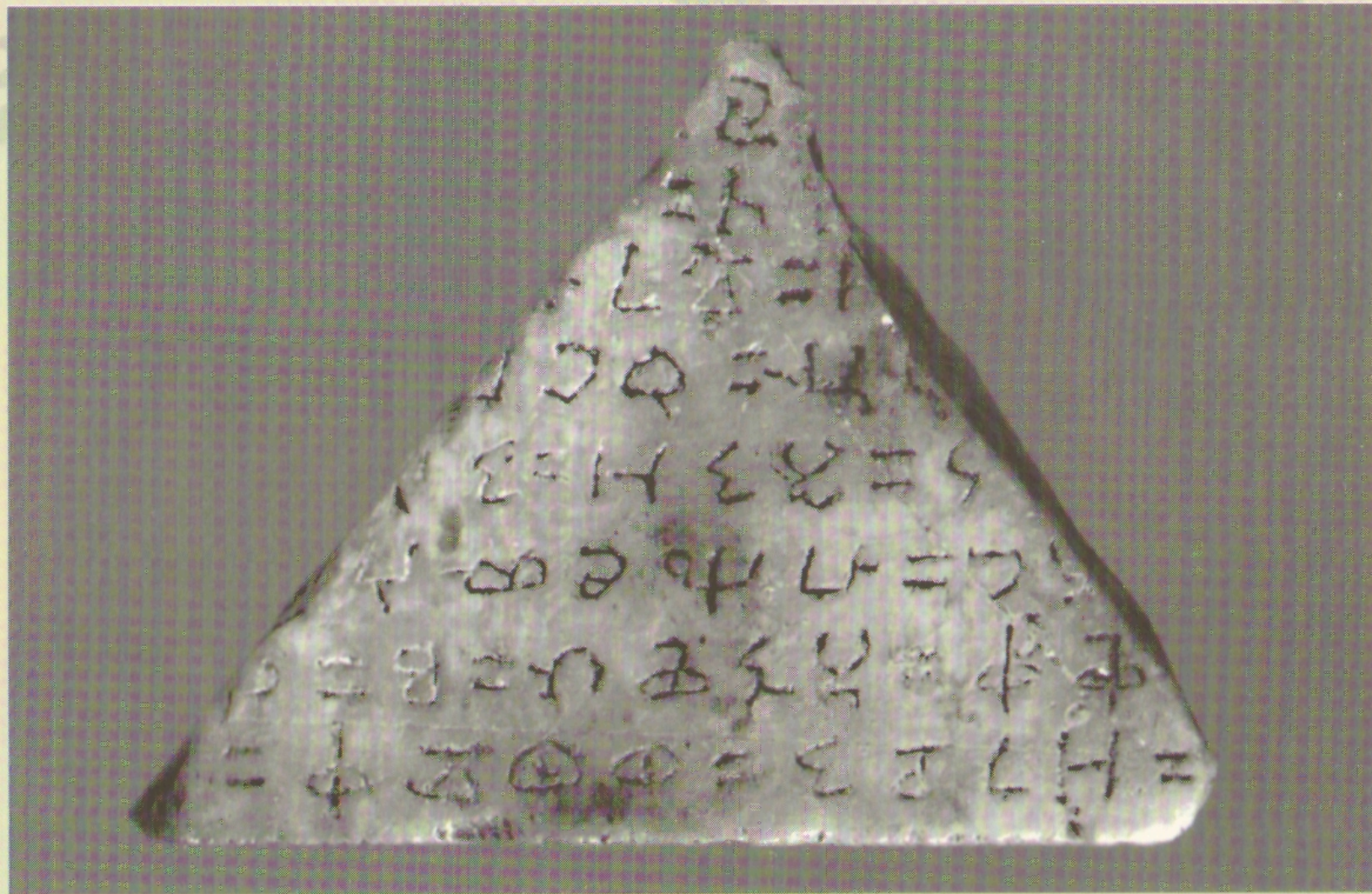


compromise, which eventually had enormous impact on the diocese and the statute of the newly formed Bulgarian Archbishopry which remained part of the Orthodox Christianity and in the close orbit of Constantinople. From that moment onward the Bulgarian state began to adopt and adapt the Byzantine state, political and cultural models, and one of the major tools in this process of adaptation was the Greek uncial script since neither the Slavs nor the Bolgars brought a script of their own to the Balkan Peninsula. They have been known for using primitive runes – lines and dashes which *Chernorizets Hrabar*, a Slavonic scholar of 10<sup>th</sup> c., described as

being used “for writing and calculating while still pagans”. And while until 864–65 the Greek uncial script was used mainly in Bulgarian epigraphy, for clerical purposes by the Bolgar rulers and among the Greek Christian population, after 870 it began to make its way into ecclesiastical manuscripts which came to Bulgaria from Byzantine to be used at church.

The stone inscriptions in Greek preserved across the Bulgarian lands are proof of firm commitment to Byzantine uncial script. It is linked to Christianity and seen as holy script until the Balkans opened a new page – the creation of the Slavic alphabet by the Byzantine missionaries – the holy brothers *Cyril* and *Methodius*. The new script was an attempt at encompassing the vast masses of Slavic tribes which swept not just across the Balkan Peninsula but through Central Europe all the way to the Adriatic coast to the south – almost reaching the Thessaloniki-Epirus line.





Coptic inscription

Zograf gospel



Codex  
Marianus



ВЪОНЪДННШВЕЗШЕСАШП  
афа: еже опавле: прна, жвх  
пергнпамфнлнскх: ноа  
нз же отлзжхузсаунеоу: вх  
звратнса в зерс мз: она же  
дшаднз

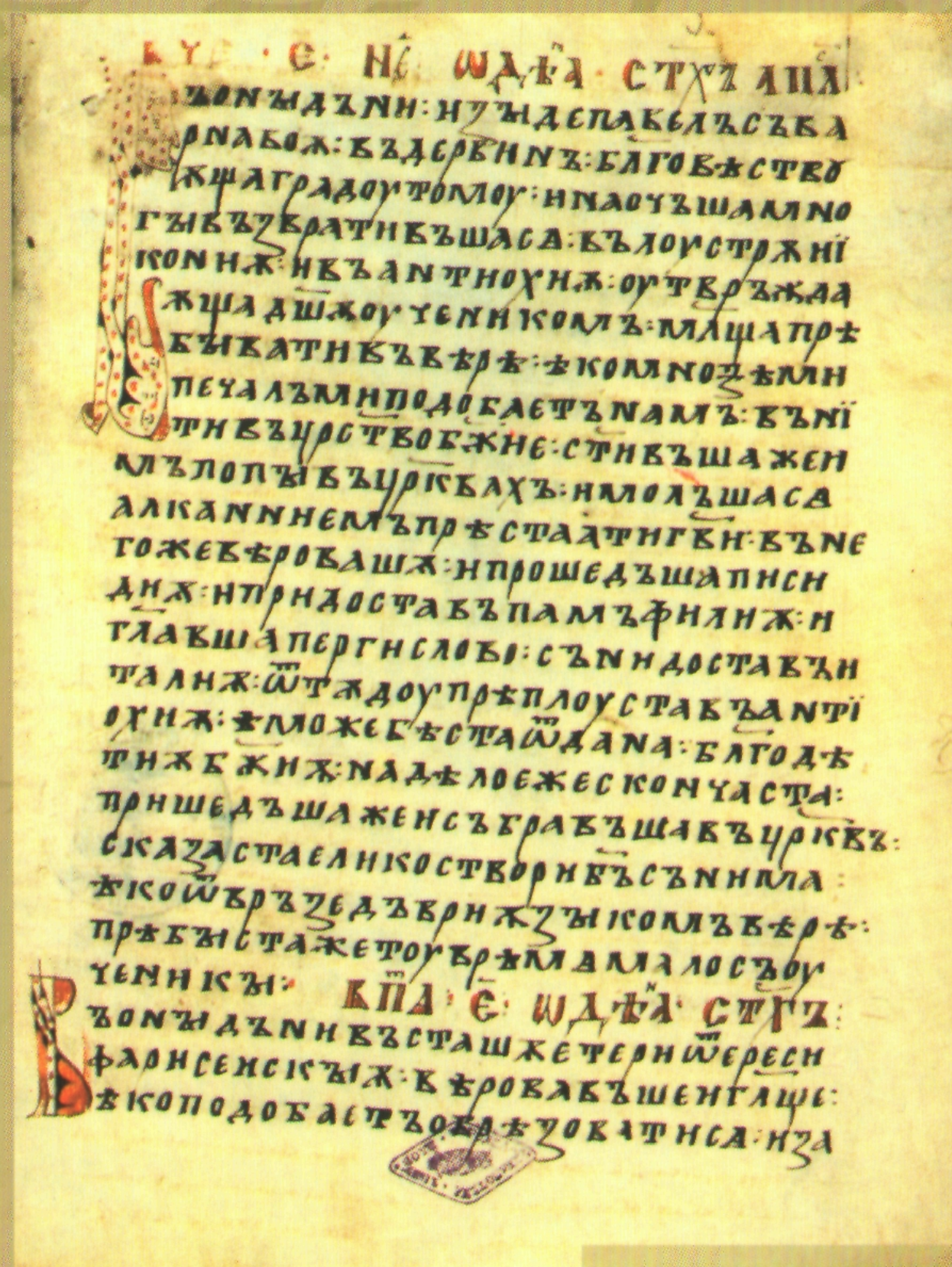


With the adoption of Christianity in 863–64 the Bulgarian state was faced by a fresh challenge – the new religion was to a large extent obscure. Neither the Greek language promoted by the Byzantine scholars who arrived to the country upon Boris's conversion by the Constantinople Patriarch, nor the Latin language preached by a small group of praelatus led by Formosa of

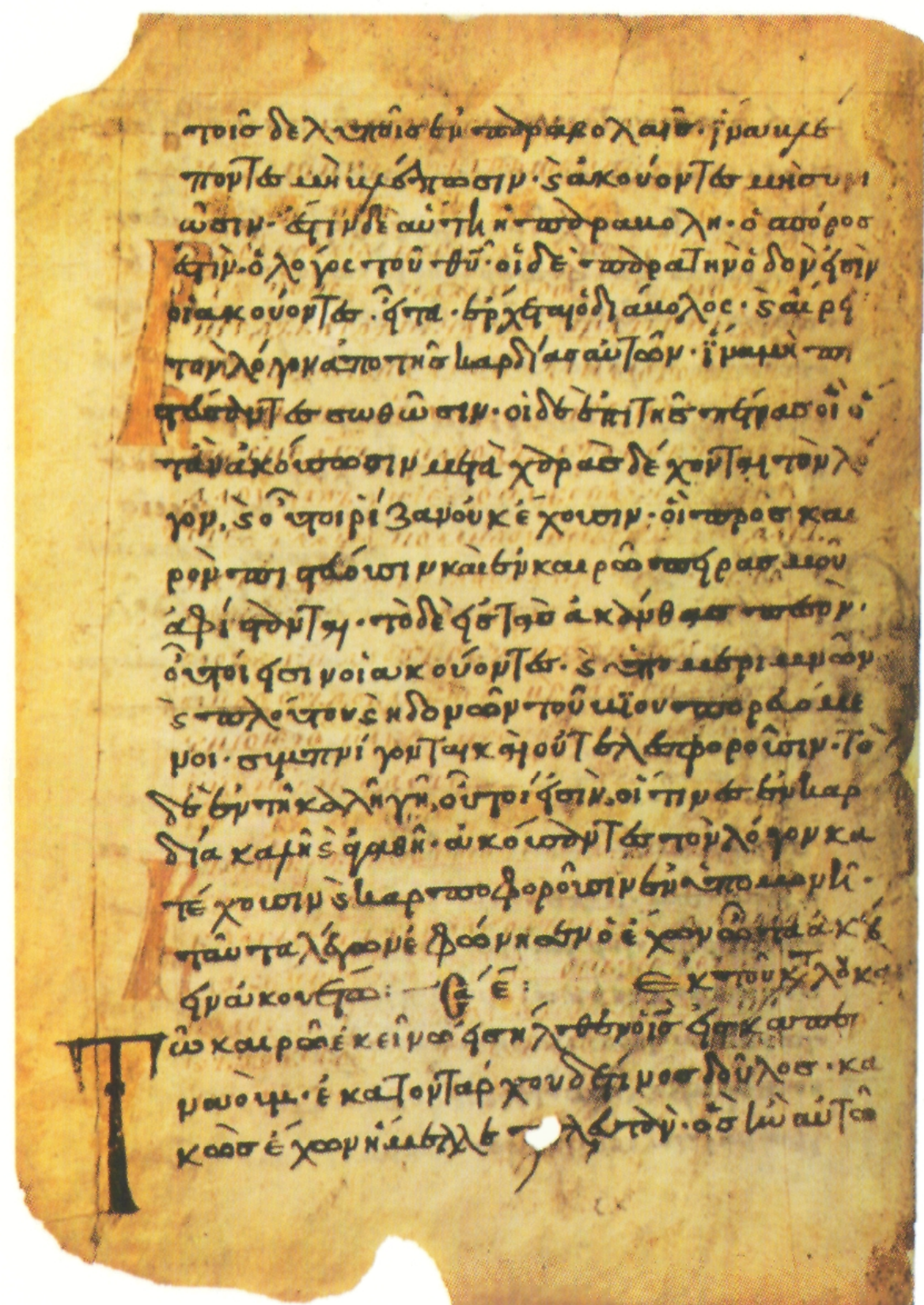
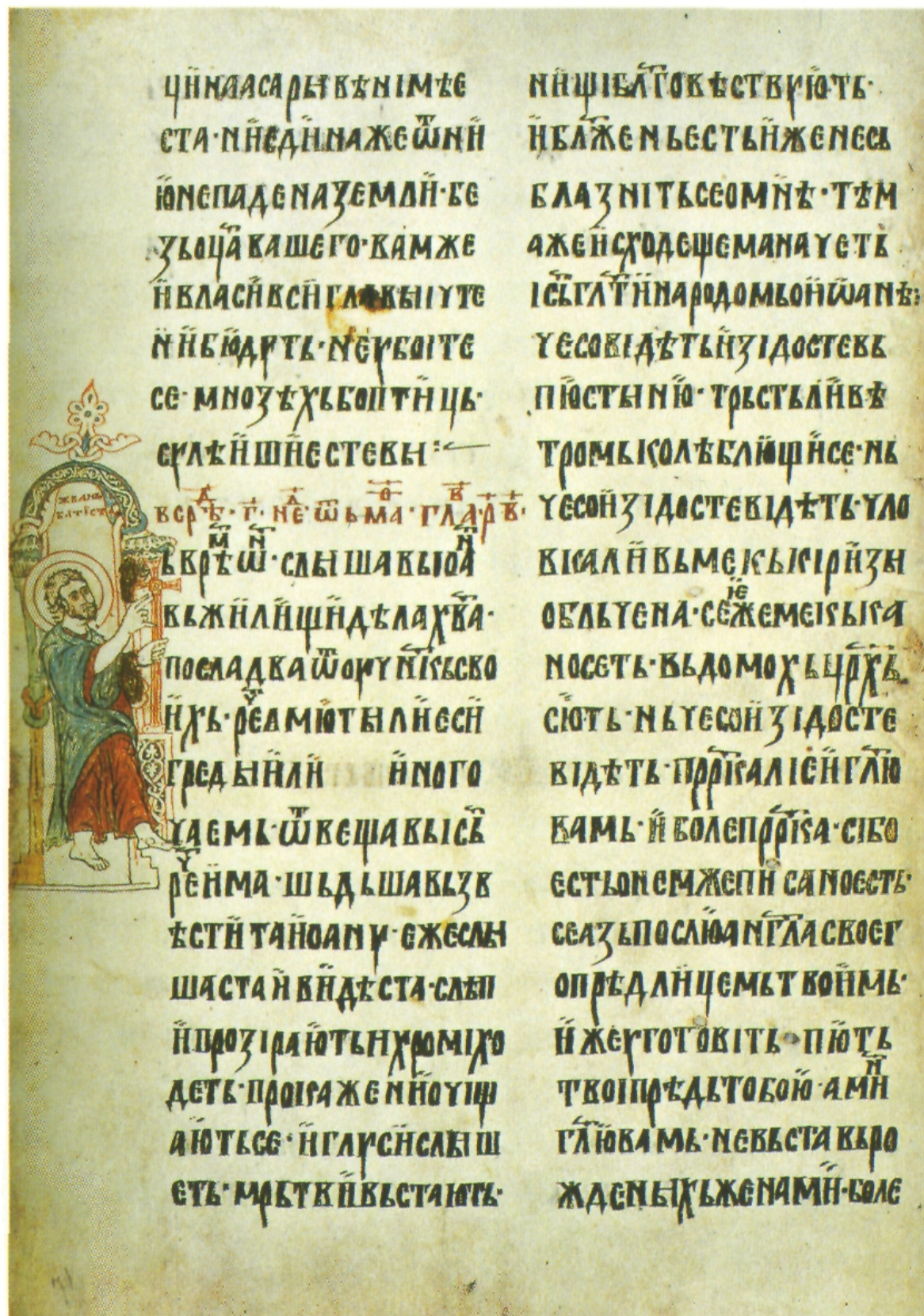
Portua, later to become the Pope of Rome who was in Bulgaria between 866 to 869, were capable of uniting the diverse population of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. It was clear that the newly converted state needed to find a language and script of its own to practically join the large family of Christian nations. At the time the policy of cultural and spiritual expansion was being drafted in Byzantine, and it aimed at integrating vast territories of Slavic population by permitting them to have sermons in their own native language while accepting the supremacy of the patriarch and subordination to his ecclesiastical diocesis. This was nothing new for the multiethnic and multilingual Byzantium. The application of so called missionary scripts and languages had already been tried out in the Armenian and Georgian provinces. The Bible had been translated into the language of the Goths by *Bishop Wulfila* in the confederation state of the Ostgoths located in northeast Bulgaria. All of these attempts had had very positive results in the expansionistic ambitions of the empire, which was why in 9th c. *Patriarch Photius* once again encouraged the creation of an alphabet for the Slavic peoples and their integration to the Constantinople diocesis. Which leads us to the missionary script of *Cyril* and *Methodius*.

The two brothers born in Thessaloniki where in the 9th century there was mixed Greek-speaking and Slavonic-speaking population and was one of the most important cultural centre across Byzantine, had the privilege of creating the Slavonic script. They were fluent in Greek since early childhood as they were in the language









of the local Slavs from Thessaloniki. The excellent education and affinity to philology provided the younger brother Constantine with a brilliant career at the Byzantine royal court. Through his relation to *Logothetes Theoktistos*, Regent to the infant *Michael 3rd*, Emperor of Byzantine, *Philosopher Constantine* rapidly advanced in his career and took part in two missions – with the Saracens, i. e. the Arabs, and the Hasarians in Byzantine Chersonesus. Hence he not only promoted Christianity but also gained further experience in languages of the periphery – Jewish, Samaritan, Syrian, he even saw samples of the early runes of the Varyags. But the most outstanding achievement of the two brothers was indeed the creation of the Slavonic alphabet. Eventually, in the middle of the 9th c, a new script appeared on the Balkans – that of the Slavs. The two brothers first devised the Glagolitic alphabet which was used for the first translations of the holy books into the spoken language of the Slavic peoples. Sent to Great Moravia to Prince *Rostislav the Great*, they established preaching in Slavonic language, and later, not without dissent with the Latin clergy albeit with the blessing of the Pope, the Slavonic gospels were consecrated in a ceremony at the Santa Maria Maggiore basilica in Rome.

*Constantine Cyril* was privileged with the mission to replace the transient vocal tradition of the Slavs with written word capturing the truth and thus overcoming the trilingual dogma – an anachronism imposed for centuries before his

Miroslav gospel  
Vatican Palimpsest





time and one condemning to stagnation and conservatism.

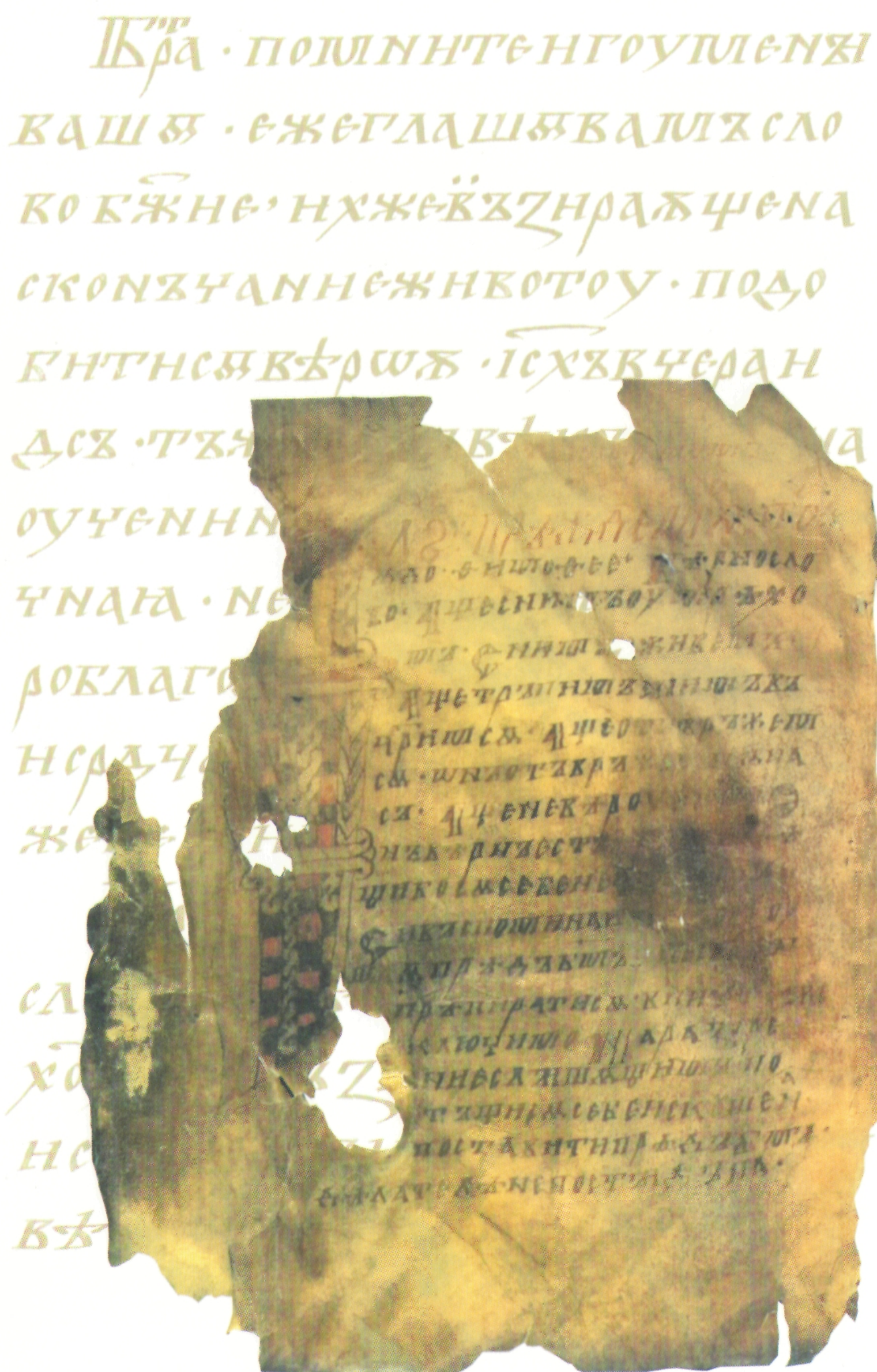
Throughout his long life in the martyrdom of his apostolic mission *Constantine Cyril* had to refute the writings of Spanish bishop *Isidore of Seville* (570–636) in his “*Ethymologiae*” (Book IX), namely “there are three sacred languages – Hebrew, Greek and Latin, which shine more than any other throughout the world. It was in these three languages that *Pontius Pilate* ordered the *Holy Crucifix* to be inscribed”. In other words, he had to overcome the imposed assumption that the Christian literature and sermons may only be provided in these three languages. The Syrians, Copts, Ethiopians, Armenians and Georgians created their own languages' scripts before the 6th c., when *Isidore of Seville's* work became the indisputable postulate.

And in fact this was the most important message of *Cyril's* achievement – the message of equality of other people to worship the Lord in their own language. His words are still true today:

“And you are not ashamed to decree only three languages, deciding that all other peoples and races should remain blind and deaf!”

His victory in the battle with trilingualism opened the way to the development of the third after Greek and Latin, and fourth after Hebrew classical language in the New Europe of 9–10 c. A language which was to function as a pan-national, international language and literature (*R. Picchio*).





And so we are now back to how their deed became reality, a fact that was due explicitly to the foresight of the Bulgarian *Knyaz Boris*. After the failure of the mission of Cyril and Methodius with the Western Slavs in Great Moravia and Panonia, and namely after the death of Methodius on 6 April 885, the disciples of the two Slavic apostles sought for help and shelter in Bulgaria – the most ancient of the Slavic state unions. Under the rule of *Boris Michael* (852–889) and *Tzar Simeon* (893–925) the disciples found nurturing circumstances to work for “Bulgaria provided them with peace”, and “it had craved for men like themselves”, as Byzantine writer

*Theophilactus the Bulgarian* (of Ohrid) wrote. And so welcoming the followers of Cyril and Methodius Bulgaria continued the two brothers' deed and became the birthplace of the Slavonic script. But then, despite the respect of the pupils of Cyril and Methodius to their teachers and their deed – the Glagolitic alphabet, still considered to be one of the most substantial philological inventions on the continent – why was a second Slavic alphabet devised in Bulgaria – the Cyrillic, the script that was to become the alphabet of the Slavs and would eventually become one of the three scripts of the European Union? After having been used by the two Slavic educators and their pupils through their missionary activities in Great Moravia and Panonia, and remaining the script of Croatia until the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, why was the Glagolitic alphabet considered an esoteric script in Bulgaria? The answer to this lies in the fact that in the former the Glagolitic alphabet was seen as an opportunity for ethnical identity and a barrier to foreign linguistic influences, whereas the



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ВАСИЛ ТОНЧЕВ



49

WILHELMUS

**В**даниє. гла. а. не прѣ просвѣщеніємъ  
Затело євліа іу хла єна бжіа. іакже  
и писано в зпррцѣ. Се азъ послаю  
аггла моего пробицема твоима . и  
же оуготоуитъ поуць твои прѣ токою  
гла вхпїющаго вхпоустини . оугото  
ваите поуць гнѣ . прави творите сѣта  
се єго . кы іоаннь ісртє вхпоустини  
ни . и проповедає ісрщєніє , покаяніє  
взоставленіє грѣховъ . инехожалше  
иснїемъ вѣса соуденїска еграна іє  
рамланиє . и ісрщаахусє в ісрдани рѣ  
це євоного исповедлюще грѣхы своє .





Bulgarians were familiar with Greek, they were far from the similarities the Glagolitic drew from the less familiar Hebrew, Coptic, Ethiopian and Samaritan alphabets. The usage of Glagolitic in Bulgaria lasted only until the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., it was abundantly documented in epigraphy and manuscripts, like the Assemani Gospel Lectionary, the Zograf Gospel, the Codex Marianus, the Psalterium Sinaiticum and the Euchologion Sinaiticum of 10–11<sup>th</sup> c.

Cyrillic, the new Bulgarian alphabet was created on the threshold between the 9 and 10<sup>th</sup> c., most probably in Preslav. It provided the continuity of the formerly spread across the Bulgarian territories Greek uncial script which as mentioned earlier, was used for the clerical needs at the Bolgar rulers' courts and for the manuscripts used by the clergy to preach Christianity to the population. The earliest Bulgarian Cyrillic artefacts are epigraphies dated 10<sup>th</sup> c. (the inscriptions at the village of Krepcha, 921, and the tombstone inscriptions from Preslav, 931), and the earliest manuscript is the Codex Suprasliensis of the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c, and the Vatican Palimpsest of the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Apostle of Enina of 11<sup>th</sup> c. and the Triodion of Bitola of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., the Palimpsest of Kyustendil of 12<sup>th</sup> c., the Apostle of Slepcha of 12<sup>th</sup> c. Of the later Cyrillic manuscripts I would distinguish the Rila Gospel Lectionary of 13<sup>th</sup> c., the Psalter of Ivan Alexander of 1337, the Chronicle of Constantine Manassas of 1344–45 from the Vatican Apostolic library, the Gospels of Tzar Ivan Alexander from 1356, kept in the



а б в г д е  
ж з и ї к л м  
н о о п р с т  
х ф х ѡ ц ш  
ч ц ъ ѳ ы ь ю я  
ї а ѳ

Бързопис по преписи на  
история славянобългарска

Scribe of Priest Gerasim

ЖЕНАШЬ. БЖЕЕЖЕСТСАТН,  
ПЫНААДУНБЛГДАРИТН  
ПАДАСТОХМЪ, ОБЛГ  
АБАНПВАНХЖЕСБ  
ПВОРНЛБЕСКНПВОРНШН  
СБНАМН. ПЫЕСХБАННШ  
ПРЕМВНАДРВІСІЖ. ОУНБН  
НАСВВЕСТКВЯСКВРНН  
ПЛВТННАХА, ННАУНБ  
ВРБШАТНСТПНАВЕСТРА  
СТПВОЕМЪ. НАКОАВБУН  
СТБСВТНІНСВВЕСТПННА  
ШЕЖПРЕМЛАЩЕУАСТПЫН  
ПВАН, ПРЕАНННАСАСТ  
МУПБЛХНКРВНХАТВО  
ЕТО. НПРЕМШЕПДА  
ННБ, НМАМЫХАЖНВЯЩА  
ВБСРЦННАШНХБ, НБЖ  
ЦРКВВЕСТПМУТВОЕМЪ.





British Library; the Psalter of Tomich of about 1360, the Gospel of Jacob from Serres from the XIV c., the Psalter of Kiev from the XIV c. and others.

Graphically Cyrillic is based on the Greek uncial script (Slavic type of script). The Cyrillic alphabet practically is a combination of the letters of the Greek alphabet and additional characters specifically designed for the old Slavonic phonemes, to which some Glagolitic characters have also been added (comparison Dujev Gospel 106, 387 and Preslav ceramic slates of 9–10th c., or Codex Suprasliensis and the Greek Gospel №2 at Princeton dated 10th c.).

Therefore the rapid replacement of the Glagolitic with Cyrillic at the Preslav school was due to the longstanding traditional usage of the Greek uncial script for the administrative, clerical, ecclesiastical and cultural needs in the capital of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, to which end sufficient original Bulgarian inscriptions are proof of. From East Bulgaria almost without exception it was Cyrillic that penetrated the Russian and the Serbian lands (eg Ostromir, Mstislavov and the Serbian Miroslav Gospels, 11–12th c.). The sum of all these data point to the conclusion that Preslav was most probably the centre where Cyrillic was devised. This most probably occurred in 893 when the Preslav convocation officially adopted the Slavic language (and respectively Cyrillic), eventually replacing the esoteric Glagolitic which resembled the Coptic and Ethiopian script.

A number of historians of European civilisation, like prof. *Riccardo Picchio*



А Б В Г Д Е Ж З  
И І К Л М Н О П  
Р С Т У Ф Х Ц Ч  
Ш Щ Ъ Ы Ь Ї Ю  
Ѧ ѧ.

А Б В Г Д Е Ж З И Й К Л  
М Н О П Р С Т У Ф Х Ц  
Ч Ш Щ Ъ Ы Ь Э Ю Я  
(і-е и іа шт).

А-Я, Ш-Щ-Ъ, В-Г-Д, И-Й-К, С, Ъ-Ю, З-Ь.  
Б-П-Ф-Г-Х-А-Т-Ж-Ш-Ъ-С-А-Р-Ц-Ч-М-Н-П.

Neofit Rilski  
Cyrillic alphabet – a school aid

A B C D E F  
 G H I J K L  
 M N O P Q R  
 S T U V W X  
 Y Z AA AB  
 AC AD AE AF  
 AG AH AI AJ  
 AK AL AM AN  
 AO AP AQ AR  
 AS AT AU AV  
 AW AX AY AZ  
 BA BB BC BD  
 BE BF BG BH  
 BI BJ BK BL  
 BM BN BO BP  
 BQ BR BS BT  
 BU BV BW BX  
 BY BZ CA CB  
 CC CD CE CF  
 CG CH CI CJ  
 CK CL CM CN  
 CO CP CQ CR  
 CS CT CU CV  
 CW CX CY CZ  
 DA DB DC DD  
 DE DF DG DH  
 DI DJ DK DL  
 DM DN DO DP  
 DQ DR DS DT  
 DU DV DW DX  
 DY DZ EA EB  
 EC ED EE EF  
 EG EH EI EJ  
 EK EL EM EN  
 EO EP EQ ER  
 ES ET EU EV  
 EW EX EY EZ  
 FA FB FC FD  
 FE FF FG FH  
 FI FJ FK FL  
 FM FN FO FP  
 FQ FR FS FT  
 FU FV FW FX  
 FY FZ GA GB  
 GC GD GE GF  
 GH GI GJ GK  
 GL GM GN GO  
 GP GQ GR GS  
 GT GU GV GW  
 GX GY GZ HA  
 HB HC HD HE  
 HF HG HH HI  
 HJ HK HL HM  
 HN HO HP HQ  
 HR HS HT HU  
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Борис Ангелушев  
1959



for instance, note in their studies that the origin of contemporary Europe is frequently sought in later ages or primarily in the Latin-Germanic West. By doing so the substantial significance of the Slavonic Orthodox world is completely neglected of the time preceding the Reformation, before the Counter Reformation or the time of the establishment of an all-Russian state under the auspices of Moscow. (The place of Old Bulgarian literature in Medieval European Culture, *Literaturnamisl*, 1981, 20).

Prof. *Arnold Toynbee* refers to the creation of the alphabet and scholastic tradition in Bulgaria's own language as a spark of creative genius of the Orthodox society, and names Bulgaria "the second centre" (after Byzantine) of the Orthodox civilisation (*A. Toynbee, A Study of History*, London 1972, 185). He claimed that had Cyril and Methodius not been from Thessaloniki but from, say, Constantinople, despite their extremely high for its age erudite it would have hardly occurred to them to devise an alphabet for the diverse Slavic peoples (*A. Toynbee, Constantine Porphyrogenetus*, London 1973, 519), and therefore their missionary deed would have hardly come anywhere close to their actual achievement.

Outstanding French historian *Alfred Rambaud* compared *Knyaz Boris's* son, Bulgarian *Tzar Simeon*, known for his patronage on literacy, to *Charlemagne*: "*Simeon* was *Charlemagne* to Bulgaria, he was more educated than our *Charlemagne* and happier than him for he lay the foundations of a national literary tradition" (*A. Rambaud, L'Empire grec au Xe siècle*, Paris 1870, p. 331 – *Histoire du développement culturel et scientifique de l'humanité*, III, Paris 1969, p. 166.).

According to *Toynbee* Bulgaria's mission for the future is to be «a bridge», «translator», «mediator» of Christian culture to the Slavs. And thus in result of Bulgaria's cultural facilitation the third centre of Orthodox culture was formed, «the last and perhaps most outstanding creative act of Orthodox civilisation – Russia» (*A. Toynbee, A Study of History*, II, p. 80; V, p. 290).

As a result of the resurrection of *Cyril* and *Methodius's* deed and the shelter offered to their pupils, the preservation of the Slavonic script and the development of a high Slavic literary corpus, the Golden Age during the rule of Bulgarian *Tzar*



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*Simeon* is compared to phenomena of the ranking of the Byzantine humanism, the Carolingian Renaissance and the Muslim revival, but unlike those is also typical of spreading the Byzantine civilization amongst the other Slavic peoples, which started originally in Bulgaria through a missionary act and a powerful teacher-follower relationship.

According to *Fr. Dvornik*, by taking advantage of the Roman church's universalism and ambitions for ultimate power, Boris managed to gain independence for the Bulgarian church, and by sheltering the disciples of *Cyril* and *Methodius* in Bulgaria – to turn the country into “the cradle of Slavic culture”. And by doing so he achieved something of immense importance – the internal, spiritual unity of the state based on the connection between language and faith, and the message for unity with the other Slavic peoples on the grounds of their common language.

To go back once again to the major topic of our statement on the message of Cyrillic, we would need to reiterate that the message is in the notion of the equality of all nations. Which indeed is true for from the point of view of doctrine of those days *Cyril* and *Methodius* considered their work an apostolic calling, their duty and plight. To this end proof lies within preserved Slavic, Greek and Latin documents of disciple Paul's preaching, “It is God's wish that all people shall be saved of spiritual and material speechlessness, the road to salvation is that which has been defined by the Lord by means of the inspired deeds of the church – the Emperor's authority and the blessing. The road to salvation of the heathens has passed through church and book. The Roman and Greek states, being the first to receive the faith of revelation, have preserved their right to mentor the newcomers into the bosom of Christianity. And so along with the concept of the “sacred states” the doctrine of the “sacred languages” was also developed, and Hebrew was added to Latin and Greek as indigenous languages linking the Old and the New Testaments.

*Cyril* and *Methodius* opposed this particular interpretation of the Holy Revelation.

“When the Philosopher was in Venice bishops, priests and black-robed monks swarmed upon him like crows on top of a falcon, and referring to the trilingual heresy said to him, “Tell us, thou, how come you now have written books







for the Slavs and are teaching them? Those were not found earlier by anybody else – neither apostles nor the Pope of Rome, nor *Gregory* of Nizianzus, or *Jeronim*, not even *Augustine*? We know but three languages by which to worship the Lord in books – Hebrew, Greek and Latin!”

To which the *Philosopher* replied:

“Does the Lord not send His rain upon us equally? Does not the sun shine upon us all too? Do not all breathe the air in the same way? And you are not ashamed to decree only three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), deciding that all other peoples and races should remain blind and deaf! Tell me: do you hold this because you consider God is so weak that he cannot grant it, or so envious that he does not wish it? Why, we do know many a peoples, they all know the books and worship the Lord in their own language. These are all known to us – the Armenians, the Persians, the Abasgians, the Georgians, the Sogdians, the Goths, the Avars, the Tirsians, the Khazars, the Arabs, the Copts, the Syrians and many others. Speaking courageously these and other words the *Philosopher* embarrassed them and left.” (*Vita Constantini* by *Clemente* of Ohrid, 9th c.)

The ecclesiastical, social and political context in which the language of *Cyril* and *Methodius* was developed reminds of the times when the Roman Church used for the first time the popular (“vulgar”) Roman and Germanic languages to preach among the people. After the end of *Cyril* and *Methodius*’s mission the language was no longer considered “an apostolic dialect” and became the official ecclesiastical language during the rule of *Knyaz Boris* and *Tzar Simeon*. This was in fact the formative achievement and message of the pupils of *Cyril* and *Methodius*. It was them who developed further the attitude to the new language and transformed it from “an apostolic dialect” into the literary language of all Slavs, whilst in its state of origin, in Bulgaria, it adopted the calling of a mission in establishing the literary norm.

In this line of considerations though a natural question springs to mind – doesn’t the usage of the Slavonic language in the 9th c. and its recognition as a homogenous linguistic entity in fact reflect traditions typical of Latin Christianity? It is acknowledged fact that the Roman Empire, similarly to Byzantine, supported the vernacular languages in all but liturgical sacraments, and therefore there was a





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distinction between passages which must be read in Latin and those than may be read in a popular (or referred to as “vulgar”) tongues. The linguistic issue in Latin Christianity is of immense significance in the 8–9<sup>th</sup> c., the attitude to this can be seen in *Pope Adrian’s* permission to *Constantine–Cyril* to preach in Slavic in Rome. This act is no coincidence. It is the result of the major goal of the Latin church to rule the newborn Roman and Germanic dialects, as well as the Slavic languages. Albeit this encouragement referred to preaching only, or else to the missionary deeds, as opposed to liturgical sacraments. Until the arrival of the pupils of *Cyril* and *Methodius* to Bulgaria following the death of *Methodius* in 885, for almost twenty years of its existence the Slavic language was granted rights of “an apostolic dialect”. Which was how it was legitimised within the Latin-Germanic world. In Bulgaria the language had already become the official ecclesiastical and literary norm. The change of alphabet – from the strange Glagolitic to the familiar from the Greek uncial script Cyrillic – was the proof of the language reform that distanced it from the permissions granted by the Roman Church. In the literary schools of Preslav and Ohrid – the legislative centres of the First Bulgarian State – Old Bulgarian scholars were not limited in using the Slavic language in liturgical sacraments. They had to create and continue creating ecclesiastical and original literature of high merit, for both popular use and for the state and church authorities. Therefore *de facto* legitimising the Slavic Language as the fourth “holy” language. With the devising of the Cyrillic by the disciples of *Cyril* and *Methodius* in the 9<sup>th</sup> century in the capital of the First Bulgarian State, a major message was constructed to the effect of integration with the large family of Christian peoples and reinstating a role of no lesser standing to theirs. A fact made possible by the literary corpus developed in Bulgaria in particular which had an essentially pragmatic role to play both for the other Slavic peoples but also in placing Bulgaria’s spiritual achievements rightfully in the context of the European continent. Hence, it is by no mere chance that Bulgaria became and is referred to as the birthplace of the second Slavonic alphabet – the Cyrillic, and of the Slavonic script.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> c. the spread of the Slavonic script marked the borders of the Slavonic-Byzantine world, whilst today with its European membership to which it brought its Cyrillic script, Bulgaria is being integrated into the broad cultural



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borders of Europe as a continent of diverse countries and three major alphabets – Latin, Greek and Bulgarian Cyrillic.

Were we to ask ourselves in conclusion what is indeed Europe to us, then perhaps the answer would be: it is the Old Continent divided by multiple borders but its typical diversity, the attractiveness of Europe nurtured though the centuries derives from the Greek and Roman antiquity, Christian culture and the three major alphabets by means of which this legacy has preserved and still preserves its memory – Latin, Greek and Cyrillic.

The Messages of Cyrillic  
*Prof. Dr. Axinia Dzurova*

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